Problems and Solutions of Bangkok Muslim Pilgrims in 2025: Historical, Cultural, and Islamic Jurisprudential Perspectives

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Abstract

The performance of Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which every Muslim who is physically and financially able must undertake at least once in their lifetime. This study aims to examine the problems and solutions facing Muslim pilgrims from Bangkok in 2025 by analyzing three dimensions: the historical dimension, the cultural dimension, and the dimension of Islamic jurisprudence. The research employs a qualitative methodology, collecting data from historical documents, texts of Islamic jurisprudence, and in-depth interviews with 10 pilgrims from Bangkok as well as 5 relevant officials. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicate that the main problems of pilgrims include (1) Structural problems inherited from historical models of Hajj management, (2) issues of cultural differences and cross-cultural communication, and (3) Problems of understanding Islamic legal provisions in contemporary social contexts. Proposed solutions should emphasize integrating knowledge from history, culture, and Islamic jurisprudence, as well as developing public policies and systematic religious preparedness. Reform the Hajj management system with state support for community and religious organizations; develop blended religious-practical pre-Hajj curricula; provide cross-cultural readiness training, language instruction, and simulations with an etiquette handbook; and offer practical fiqh courses, niyyah training, and fatwa-guidelines for emergencies.

Keywords: Pilgrims, Thai Muslims, Islamic history, Islamic urisprudence (Fiqh), Islamic culture

Introduction

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and is considered a religious obligation that every Muslim must perform at least once in a lifetime if physically and financially able (al-Qaradawi, 1999; Ibn Qudamah, 1997). Theologically, Hajj is not merely a journey to a sacred site but a process of spiritual training and self-discipline, as well as a symbol of human equality before God (Peters, 1994).

In the Thai social context, pilgrimage to Hajj especially by Muslims from Bangkok is not only a religious activity but is also intertwined with complex social, cultural, economic, and state-policy dimensions (Jaidee, 2015; Muhammad, 2017). This is because undertaking Hajj requires extensive systems for transportation, healthcare, diplomacy, and large-scale administration.

Historically, Muslim pilgrimage from the Southeast Asian region to perform Hajj took many months, relying on sea voyages across the Indian Ocean and maritime trade networks (Azra, 2004; Peters, 1994). Such journeys were not only religious acts but also important channels for transmitting religious knowledge and culture from the Arab world to Southeast Asia (Roy, 2004).

However, entering the twentieth century, the development of air transportation significantly changed pilgrimage patterns. The number of pilgrims increased rapidly while modern nation-states began to play a greater role in regulating religious activities, especially concerning security, public health, and international relations (Masud et al., 2006).

In Thailand's case, the state has established specialized agencies to oversee Hajj travel, such as the Hajj Affairs Division of Thailand, and enacted laws and regulations to govern these activities, reflecting that Hajj is not merely a religious matter but also a public policy issue (Hajj Affairs Division of Thailand, 2024).

Despite improvements in infrastructure and management systems, pilgrims' problems persist, such as communication issues, health problems, difficulties in understanding rituals, and inconsistencies between religious principles and contemporary social contexts (Kamali,

2008; Turner, 1973). This study therefore aims to examine these problems in the specific context of pilgrims from Bangkok in 2025.

The researchers focus on Bangkok pilgrims in 2025 because they differ from regional pilgrims: urban lifestyles emphasize modernity and haste, reducing participation in traditional Muslim communities and hindering transmission of religious knowledge. Social and cultural distances have increased, while Saudi regulations after COVID-19 such as health restrictions and crowd control have tightened, forcing urban pilgrims to adapt in practice and communication.

Literature Review

1. Hajj in the Historical Dimension

Historical studies indicate that Hajj is a religious institution that has played a significant role in shaping Muslim societies globally (Peters, 1994). In the Southeast Asian context, pilgrim networks contributed importantly to the spread of Islam and the development of religious educational institutions (Azra, 2004). Suchart Jaidee (2015) notes that travel for Hajj by Thai Muslims during the Ayutthaya and early Rattanakosin periods relied on maritime trade networks and carried high risks from disease and insecurity. Nevertheless, Hajj served as a crucial channel for transmitting mainstream Sunni religious knowledge into Thai society. With the emergence of modern nation-states in the twentieth century, Hajj travel began to be more systematically regulated by state policy, especially regarding travel documents and disease control (Masud et al., 2006).

2. Hajj in the Cultural Dimension

Turner (1973) proposes that pilgrimage is a social transition process (rite of passage) that moves pilgrims from a previous status to a new status within society. In the case of Thai Muslims, performing Hajj often affects social standing and roles within the community (Abdullah Muhammad, 2017). Hall (1997) points out that culture is the frame through which people interpret the world; therefore, cultural differences between Thai society and Saudi

Arabian society can cause cultural shock among pilgrims, particularly in matters of language, institutional norms, and gender relations.

3. Hajj in the Dimension of Islamic Jurisprudence

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, Hajj is defined as fard al-'ayn for those who possess the capacity (istita'ah), both physically and financially (Ibn Qudamah, 1997; al-Zuhayli, 2005). However, contemporary jurists such as Kamali (2008) argue that interpretation of religious rulings must consider the maqasid al-shari'ah (the objectives of Islamic law) to align with changing social contexts.

Research Gaps

Although existing studies provide a basic framework for understanding the historical, cultural, and Islamic jurisprudence dimensions related to Thai Muslim pilgrimage, there remain knowledge and methodological gaps that should be addressed as follows.

1. Comparative spatial and temporal analysis: Previous research often focuses on historical overviews or single-case studies (e.g., the Ayutthaya period, early Rattanakosin, or contemporary national-level contexts). There is a lack of comparative studies between pilgrims from different regions of Thailand (Bangkok vs. southern border provinces/central/northern regions) and comparisons across different time periods (before–after shifts in air transport systems or before–after major state policies). Such comparative analyses would better reveal the dynamics of experience and structural impacts.
2. Gaps in the cultural, practical, and cross-cultural communication dimension: Theoretical work points to cultural shock and symbolic differences, but there is insufficient in-depth study of pilgrims' actual practices—e.g., language adaptation strategies, patterns of using communication technologies, management of gender and family roles during the rites, and the role of Thai Muslim community networks

before and after travel. Ethnographic research that follows pilgrims during their journeys would help fill this gap.

3. Gaps in Islamic jurisprudence in the modern context: Although scholarship describes Hajj as fard al-'ayn conditional on istita'ah, there is limited analysis of applying maqasid-based approaches and fatwa principles in specific situations—e.g., chronic illness, elderly pilgrims, or those with economic burdens. There is also a lack of systematic inquiry into the perspectives of religious actors (imams, muftis) and how state agencies act when conflicts arise between religious rulings and public health or security demands.
4. Public policy and implementation evaluation gaps: Studies document the establishment of state agencies and regulations but lack systematic evaluations of how effective these measures are for pilgrim outcomes (e.g., health, satisfaction, understanding of rituals). There is also little research on cross-border cooperation with Saudi agencies or international bodies to address systemic problems.

Research objectives

1. To analyze the impact of historical Hajj management structures on Bangkok pilgrims.
2. To analyze pilgrims' problems in the cultural and social dimensions.
3. To examine issues in the dimension of Islamic jurisprudence related to performing Hajj.
4. To propose integrated solutions appropriate to the Thai social context in 2025.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study is qualitative research aiming to examine the problems and solutions of Muslim pilgrims from Bangkok in 2025 through a three-dimensional analytical framework: the historical dimension, the cultural dimension, and the dimension of Islamic jurisprudence. The framework integrates concepts from social history, cultural anthropology, and Islamic

jurisprudence. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study's goals because it seeks to understand pilgrims' experiences, meanings, and interpretations rather than to quantify phenomena.

2. Informants

The primary informants are 10 Muslim pilgrims from Bangkok who performed Hajj in 2025, selected by purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, age, and educational level, thus reflecting varied pilgrim experiences Secondary informants include five officials and stakeholders involved in Hajj management, who provide contextual information on administration and policy. The details of the questions are as follows:

2.1 Questions for pilgrims

1. Please describe your preparation for Hajj (sources of knowledge, language skills, practical training).
2. Before departure, did you receive training on religious rites and practical procedures? If so, how?
3. During the rituals, were there any acts you were uncertain about being rukun, wajib, or sunnah? Please give examples.
4. How do you understand niyyah (intention), and do you feel your niyyah preparation was adequate?
5. Did you experience communication problems (English/Arabic) during the journey? When did they occur and how were they resolved?
6. What aspects of cultural shock did you experience most in Mecca or Medina, and how did you adapt?
7. When facing crowding or route restrictions, how did you adjust your ritual performance, and did any religious questions arise?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of relying on commercial Hajj operators (saeh) for your religious preparation?

9. If there were a pre-Hajj course combining fiqh, language, and simulations, what content and teaching format would you prefer?
10. What recommendations do you have for the state, community, or operators to improve pilgrim preparation and care?

2.2 Questions for officials and stakeholders in Hajj management

1. Please describe your role and responsibilities in managing Hajj for pilgrims from Bangkok.
2. What criteria currently govern licensing and oversight of Hajj operators regarding religious knowledge, education, or cross-cultural communication?
3. How do you assess the main problems caused by reliance on commercial agents for pilgrims' religious preparation?
4. What adjustments have been made to safety and health measures post-COVID-19, and how have they affected pilgrims' performance of Hajj?
5. Are there programs or measures to improve pilgrims' language skills or cultural understanding before departure?
6. How do you promote the role of community and religious organizations in pre-Hajj preparation in partnership with the state?
7. In emergencies such as extreme crowding or route restrictions, are there fiqh practices or religious guidelines used to make decisions? Please provide examples.
8. How does your agency assess the quality of pilgrim preparation? What indicators or criteria are used?
9. What opportunities do you see for using information technology to improve preparation and communication with pilgrims?
10. Do you have policy or practical recommendations to adapt Hajj management to urban contexts (e.g., revising operator licensing, requiring religious instructors in groups, or predeparture training programs)? If so, please briefly describe.

3. Data Collection Instruments

3.1 Main data collection instruments: Semi-structured interview guides

3.2 Document analysis form Interview topics cover the three dimensions:

(1) Experiences in preparing for and undertaking Hajj

(2) Cultural issues and adaptation abroad

(3) Understanding of Islamic jurisprudential rulings related to Hajj

Semi-structured interviews allow informants to freely reflect on their experiences while maintaining a clear research-topic framework (Creswell, 2013).

4. Data Collection

Data were collected between October and December 2025. The researcher conducted individual interviews lasting approximately 30-45 minutes per person, with audio recording after obtaining prior consent. Documentary sources reviewed included:

- Reports of the Hajj Affairs Division of Thailand
- Fiqh texts on Hajj
- Related international studies

5. Data Analysis

Interview and documentary data were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis. Data were coded according to key issues:

- Structural problems
- Cultural problems
- Problems related to Islamic jurisprudential provisions

Codes were grouped into main themes to synthesize the study findings

Finding

The research findings can be categorized into three main issues according to the conceptual framework:

(1) Historical dimension

(2) Cultural dimension

(3) Dimension of Islamic jurisprudence

(1) Historical Dimension

The study found that the Hajj management system for pilgrims from Bangkok remains influenced by traditional administrative structures rooted in the era when Hajj travel relied on agents or middlemen (Suchart Jaidee, 2015; Masud et al., 2006). Several informants noted, "Most of the preparation depends on travel agencies rather than religious training," reflecting that management still emphasizes logistical dimensions over spiritual ones. This corresponds with Peters's (1994) finding that as Hajj became a large-scale modern activity, bureaucracy and commercial interests grew in influence, sometimes overshadowing religious aspects. Moreover, centralization of Hajj management at the state level while helping to standardize safety and health has reduced pilgrims' proactive roles in preparing religious knowledge. Some Hajj companies in Bangkok focus too heavily on business and are reluctant to invest, especially in hiring genuinely specialized religious scholars on Hajj. Instead, they use pilgrims within the travel group who have some knowledge but are not experts to provide instruction, offering those pilgrims discounted Hajj packages in exchange for acting as the group's religious guide. These practices are business bargaining tactics that reveal the operators' negative cunning, but they are deeply regrettable in terms of the correctness of ibadah and academic standards, as pilgrims may sometimes receive inaccurate religious information and be treated merely as instruments. As many Western philosophers, such as Emmanuel Kant, have argued, human beings should be ends in themselves, not merely means for pursuing profit.

The remedial approach should reform the Hajj management system away from reliance on commercial agents toward integrating the roles of community and religious organizations, with the state acting as facilitator. This includes: developing pre-Hajj curricula that combine religious instruction with practical training; training community leaders and local volunteers to provide grassroots religious education; reducing information monopolies

held by single agents; establishing quality-assessment systems for pilgrim preparation; and opening communication channels among the state, communities, and local agencies. These measures will increase transparency and strengthen pilgrims' preparedness in religious matters, not just logistics.

(2) Cultural Dimension

In the cultural dimension, pilgrims clearly experienced "cultural shock," particularly in the following areas:

- Language and communication: Most pilgrims were unable to communicate effectively in Arabic or English, causing confusion in following officials' instructions.

- Rules and public discipline: Pilgrims from Thai society, accustomed to social flexibility, faced strict regulatory systems in Mecca and Medina.

- Cultural understandings of gender and space: Several female informants reported feeling uncomfortable with the segregation of spaces and the regulation of gender roles in public areas.

Turner (1973) describes pilgrimage as a liminal phase in which pilgrims temporarily relinquish previous identities and adapt to new systems; these findings clearly reflect that concept.

The intervention should implement pre-departure cross cultural preparedness programs by offering basic English/Arabic language training and key command phrases. Conduct simulations on rules, queue management, and distancing to reduce cultural shock induced panic. Provide psychological counseling and adaptation support for cultural migrants, with special attention to women. Produce a Thai-language cultural-etiquette handbook explaining the reasons behind gender segregated spaces and social regulations to foster understanding and acceptance. Coordinate with community leaders to communicate guidance before and during the journey.

(3) Islamic Jurisprudence Dimension

In the dimension of Islamic jurisprudence, three major problems were identified:

- Lack of understanding of Hajj's legal structure: Some pilgrims could not distinguish between rukun (essential pillars), wajib (obligatory acts) and sunnah (recommended practices). This caused anxiety that their rituals might be incomplete

- Problems performing rites under contemporary constraints: Crowding, route controls, and time limits prevented some pilgrims from fully performing classical ritual patterns.

- Misunderstandings about intention (niyyah): Some pilgrims prioritized ritual completeness over spiritual dimensions, which contradicts Hajj's primary religious aim.

Real-life examples include stoning the Jamarat in dangerously crowded conditions, where officials may set timed rounds or alternate routes, causing some pilgrims to postpone their stoning or have someone act on their behalf (wakalah). Tawaf in overcrowded spaces may prevent completing full circuits. Scholars or officials may invoke the principle of darurah (necessity) and fiqh flexibility, permitting adjusted or lenient practices based on fatwas to preserve life and overall safety.

The remedial approach should develop a clear, practice-oriented fiqh of Hajj curriculum, structuring lessons around rukun, wajib, and sunnah, and including case studies and flexible procedures for modern constraints. Provide hands-on training and workshops that rehearse rites in simulated settings. Train pilgrims in setting niyyah (intention) both attitudinally and spiritually to emphasize the essence of Hajj. Establish fiqhi decision-making guidelines for emergency situations such as extreme crowding or route restrictions based on guidance from religious scholars and fatwa committees familiar with contemporary contexts.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that the problems experienced by Muslim pilgrims from Bangkok in 2025 are not merely individual issues but are the result of historical structures, cultural systems, and frameworks for interpreting Islamic jurisprudence that coexist within a modern social context.

In the historical dimension, the results support the ideas of Peters (1994) and Masud et al. (2006), who point out that when pilgrimage becomes a mass activity, bureaucracy and business interests play an increasingly significant role, causing spiritual aspects to be marginalized. Thailand's Hajj management structure, which has roots in an era dependent on travel agents and middlemen (Suchart Jaidee, 2015), continues to influence current management practices. In other words, preparations related to documentation and travel are clearer than preparations for religious knowledge and spiritual readiness.

In the cultural dimension, the findings are consistent with Hall's (1997) view that culture is a framework for perceiving the world. When pilgrims from a Thai context enter an Arab cultural context with different social norms and systems, cultural tension (cultural shock) inevitably arises. In addition, Turner's (1973) concept of liminality helps explain pilgrimage as a transitional social status, during which pilgrims must temporarily abandon their previous identities and confront new rules. The study found that pilgrims who lack cultural preparation tend to experience more stress and confusion than those who have undergone systematic training.

In the dimension of Islamic jurisprudence, the findings support Kamali's (2008) proposal that interpreting religious texts in the modern era requires the maqasid al-shariah framework to preserve the higher objectives of religion, rather than clinging solely to outward ritual forms. The confusion among some pilgrims regarding rulings categorized as rukn, wajib, and sunnah reflects a gap between theoretical fiqh knowledge and application in real situations constrained by space, time, and crowd control.

Moreover, the results reflect the social dimension of pilgrimage as "moral capital": those who perform Hajj often gain elevated moral status within their communities (Abdullah Muhamad, 2017). However, if pilgrimage is reduced to mere outward ritual without spiritual transformation, such expected social value may not be realized.

Therefore, addressing pilgrims' problems cannot be limited to improving travel systems or accommodation alone; it must also consider the structure of knowledge and cultural structures alongside flexible and principled interpretation of religious texts.

Conclusion

The study "Bangkok's Muslim Pilgrims in 2025: Problems and Solutions in the Historical, Cultural, and Islamic Jurisprudence Dimensions" found that the main problems of pilgrims can be categorized into three key dimensions:

1. Historical dimension: Thailand's Hajj management structure remains influenced by traditional models that rely on travel agents and state regulation, causing religious and spiritual preparedness to receive insufficient attention.

2. Cultural dimension: Differences in language, systems of order, and social norms between the Thai context and the Saudi Arabian context produce cultural shock and difficulties in pilgrims' adaptation.

3. Islamic jurisprudence dimension: Some pilgrims lack a basic understanding of the jurisprudential structure of Hajj rulings and are confused about applying fiqh principles under contemporary constraints.

The findings indicate that solutions must be integrated across all three dimensions rather than addressing any single aspect alone. As for how to implement an integrated approach, the researcher has already proposed solutions in the findings mentioned above.

Therefore, Hajj in the 21st century for urban Muslims is not determined solely by physical ability and financial means (istita'ah). It also requires cross-cultural adaptability understanding and accepting different social practices, basic language communication skills, and mental flexibility as well as information and communication technology literacy for planning, accessing health and safety information, and managing risks during rituals. These capacities help ensure a smooth, spiritually correct pilgrimage experience.

Suggestions

1. Develop a national training curriculum for pilgrims that is comprehensive covering fiqh of Hajj, pilgrimage history, culture, and cross-cultural communication because these elements are interrelated and cannot be treated separately.
2. Develop personnel who care for pilgrims (group leaders) to possess both religious knowledge and practical skills in psychology and group management, rather than offering superficial solutions or focusing solely on commercial gain. All Islamic business practices must be halal, correct, and transparent. Good character should precede technical competence.
3. Use information technology such as mobile applications and digital media to provide education on Hajj rituals and cultural adaptation.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct quantitative research on the level of fiqh (Hajj jurisprudence) knowledge among pilgrims in each region to assess their capacity and understanding of Islamic law, since Hajj remains an ibadah, not merely tourism or business.
2. Undertake comparative studies between Thai pilgrims and those from other Southeast Asian countries to identify findings that can be adapted to the Thai context.
3. Study the impact of pilgrimage on pilgrims' moral behavior and social roles after returning to their communities to determine the direction and extent of any changes.

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